

Dear band parents,

Hello, my name is Thomas Downey, and I am the current band director at Saint John's, Saint Teresa's, and Saint Patrick's Catholic Schools. This is my first year teaching band in the Lincoln area, and I have been working hard these first few months in order to get into the swing of things. This letter home contains some important information about band and concerts, and my personal expectations, but I would like to first introduce myself.

I graduated from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas with a Bachelors in Music Education. This is my seventh year teaching fifth grade through eighth grade band, and I have also taught general music and choir. I married the music teacher at Saint Peter's and moved to Lincoln this past July from my home town of Des Moines, Iowa. I specialize in playing low brass instruments such as tuba and trombone, but have become adept at most band instruments because of my work.

My schedule this year has probably become apparent, but I will post it below for the sake of everyone who has a bad memory, like me.

Every day: Pius X- 7:45-8:45

Monday: St Johns 9:15-3:45

Tuesdays: St Teresa- 9:15-3:45

Wednesday: St Teresa- 9:15-3:45

Thursday: St Patrick- 9:15-3:45

Friday: St Johns- 9:15-3:45

These are also the day when students need to bring instruments and music to school for either lessons or group band rehearsals. I have had some people ask about concerts this year, so here are the important dates and times to remember. Dress code is the same as regular school dress code.

January Concert Rehearsal

Date: Saturday, January 13th 2018

5th Grade Time: 2:00 – 2:45

6th-8th Grade Time: 2:45-3:30

Location: Pius X High School

January Concert

Date: Sunday, January 14th 2018

Time: 1:30 PM

Location: Pius X High School

Please have your students there at least 15 minutes before these times to give them a chance to get their instruments put together and to get seated.

Expectations

I knew when I was hired that I was entering into a position that was held for a long time by a much loved band director. I know that she had expectations of the students when it came to practice, lessons, rehearsals, and concerts, and I have talked with the students about these. My expectations are very similar. Here are my expectations of band students in 5th-8th grade.

1. Students need to come prepared to in school lessons and rehearsals. This means music, instrument, and pencil at the very least.
2. Students need to come prepared to band concerts. Concerts are few and far between and work to show development, like a midterm or final exam in high school or college.
3. Students need to practice at home.

The last of these is the most difficult. I have no way of truly enforcing if a student practices at home or not. In January, after the concert, I will be giving out a special practice log for every student which should be used to record practice times and give instructions on how to practice (and how to help your student practice). I have only one request for students and parents.

Please have your student practice for at least 10 minutes 6-7 days of the week!

Studies have shown that the muscle memory and habits required to be excellent at any musical instrument are developed through daily repetition. Think about this, your student is taught at school math, science, social studies, reading, writing, and their other "core" subjects daily because it is this constant reinforcement that makes students not just learn, but retain knowledge. Music is the same.

My recommendation is to have your student practice their instrument as a break between other subject area's homework. If they have math and social studies homework, have them practice their instrument in between the subjects as a sort of break.

Remember that band is more than a chance to let your student try something new. Band is hard. Band is a challenge. Band contains a combination of skills that can benefit a student for their whole life, regardless of how long they participate. Band takes hard work, discipline, perseverance, and dedication to become great, and helps develop those virtues in those who participate.

Helpful Practice Tips

1. Have a set practice location, one that provides a setting for quiet and focus. This should include a good chair and a stand to hold music.
2. Have a set general time for practice. No one has a perfectly consistent schedule, so "immediately after dinner" or "in the middle of homework time" are often as good as we can get.
3. Students should always have a pencil, but the second best practice tool is a...
4. Metronome! A metronome is a device that provides a constant speed to play with. This is a drummer's best friend, but is great for everyone to have. There are free metronome apps, \$15 metronomes at music stores, or just try typing "metronome" into google.

My hope is that everyone who does band in the Lincoln Diocese can have a wonderful experience, one that they can pass on to their children one day. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.